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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [KWMN](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: C-NE7-00774: OMAN ELECTION UPDATE

REF: A. MUSCAT 742

[1](#)B. MUSCAT 181  
[1](#)C. 06 MUSCAT 1468

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alfred F. Fonteneau for  
Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) A total of 632 candidates are competing in the October 27 elections for the Majlis al-Shura. Contacts indicate that only one of the twenty female candidates stands a good chance of being elected. Final voter registration figures show a substantial increase over corresponding numbers for the 2003 elections despite continued apathy among Omanis towards the upcoming polls. Some of this increase is likely attributable to vigorous efforts by candidates to file registration forms on behalf of their potential supporters, as well as to the government's "get out the vote" campaign. The government does not intend to issue official invitations to non-governmental organizations to observe the elections. Local media is playing a limited role in the run-up to the elections, but remains cautious in publishing the political views or policies of candidates. End Summary.

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A FINAL FIELD OF CANDIDATES  
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[1](#)2. (U) With roughly one month left before the holding of national polls for the Majlis al-Shura (the lower house of Oman's bicameral consultative body), preparations for the elections by both candidates and the government are swinging into high gear. After approving 717 individuals in May to compete in the October 27 elections (ref A), the Ministry of Interior announced on August 19 that candidates would have one more week to withdraw from the electoral race before the government began finalizing candidate lists. (Note: As reported ref A, a number of initial candidates historically drop out voluntarily due to low support or after negotiating deals with their competitors. End Note.) On September 10, the Interior Ministry confirmed 632 names on the final list of candidates, compared to 506 running for election in the 2003 national polls. In only one district, in the governorate of al-Buraimi, is a candidate running unopposed. The Ministry has created an easily accessible website that contains the names, and accompanying photos, of the candidates for each electoral district.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Twenty women remain candidates in the election, including one of the two women who are members of the current Majlis. Contacts speculate, however, that only one of the 20 has a good chance of being elected. (Note: The more popular

of the two women in the Majlis declined to run again. End Note.) To increase the participation of women in the electoral process, the Omani Women's Association of Muscat held an elections awareness seminar on October 1, featuring Shukur al-Ghamari, a current Majlis al-Dawla member and former al-Shura member, as the keynote speaker.

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AN UNEXPECTED INCREASE IN VOTER REGISTRATION  
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¶4. (U) After extending the voter registration period by three months until the end of July (ref A), the government's central elections committee announced in the press on September 8 that registration had increased by nearly 50% over the numbers for the 2003 elections. The most recent government-supplied figures, as announced by the Minister of Interior, state that 388,683 Omanis are registered to vote. Names of registered voters are listed electronically on a Ministry of Interior website. Hard copy lists of voter names are available at the local government office for each district.

¶5. (C) Several contacts, including within the Majlis al-Shura, were somewhat surprised that voter registration had increased by such a significant amount given the continued apathy among many Omanis towards the elections and the Majlis in general (refs A-C). There are a number of possible reasons for this increase. First, Oman's rapidly growing population has resulted in a natural surge of eligible voters. Second, the government's concerted and extensive "get out the vote" campaign (refs A-C) may have succeeded in prodding a sizable number of reluctant voters to register. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, anecdotal evidence suggests that many Omanis did not register themselves, but

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signed registration forms (sometimes blank) at the behest of candidates and their supporters, who then completed filling out the forms and filed them with relevant officials. (Note: Omani law does not require eligible voters to personally submit registration forms as long as they voluntarily sign the form and the person filing it presents the registrant's national identity card. End Note.)

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VOTING CENTERS ANNOUNCED  
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¶6. (U) On September 24, the central elections committee announced that 102 voting centers had been designated for the casting of ballots within Oman. The number of centers in each region roughly corresponds to its population. The heavily-populated al Batinah region along Oman's northern coast, for example, contains 29 voting centers, while there are only four centers in the sparsely-populated al Wusta region. Voting in the Sultanate's designated embassies outside the country (i.e. in all other GCC states as well as Yemen, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia and Malaysia) will commence on October 20, one week before the balloting inside Oman.

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THE (LIMITED) ROLE OF OBSERVERS AND THE PRESS  
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¶7. (C) On October 2, Sayyid Saud bin Ibrahim al-Busaidi, Minister of Interior, held an unannounced meeting with members of the Oman Journalists Association and press officials to further elaborate on the electoral process. Busaidi noted that the Ministry did not plan on formally inviting international or non-governmental organizations to observe the elections, reasoning that the government did not expect to experience any irregularities during the process. Responding to audience concerns about the lack of international observers, the Minister commented that the most important goal for the government was to carry out "fair,

free, and transparent" elections, not to ensure that they receive extensive international coverage. Busaidi added that there were mechanisms in place to safeguard the electoral process, and that in any event, the Omanis were "honest."

18. (SBU) On the media front, government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" took the unprecedented step of publishing a special supplement on August 7 featuring the photos and names of all approved candidates. The following day, Arabic independent daily "Shabiba" published the first-ever interviews with some of the candidates covering their backgrounds and general views, but not their platforms (assuming they have them). On August 22, the Ministry of Information held a workshop for television and radio reporters on the conducting of live coverage of the elections. The Ministry will establish a media center for journalists to receive information from the Shura elections committee.

19. (U) Amending a prior prohibition on newspaper campaign ads, the central elections committee announced on September 12 that candidates would be allowed -- as of September 15 -- to publish advertisements in the press. These ads, however, may include only the candidate's name, picture and resume in a space of no more than three standard columns. In his October 2 meeting with journalists, the Interior Minister stressed that the ad specifications would be strictly adhered to in order to provide equal opportunity for all candidates, regardless of income. Nevertheless, given the relatively high cost of taking out such an ad in major Omani dailies (over USD 1,300), only a handful have appeared to date.

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